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SUBJECT: FAMILY AND FRIENDS: NEPOTISM IN THE MUTHARIKA GOVERNMENT

Classified By: CDA David Gilmour for reasons 1.5 b and d

1. (C) SUMMARY. President Mutharika has placed relatives in key government positions as he struggles to build a political base for himself and his party. The president's cousin is serving as head of the Public Service, and two adult daughters have been appointed to positions in State House. Mutharika is also believed to have appointed the head and the deputy head of the police because they come from his home district. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) Following a longstanding tradition in Malawian politics, President Mutharika has appointed close relatives to important government positions. The most prominent appointment to date is that of his cousin, Charles Matabwa, who was named to a newly created position as head of the country's civil service. Mutharika inherited a relative of his predecessor Bakili Muluzi in the position of Secretary to the President and Cabinet (SPC), the administrative head of the President's office and the entire Civil Service. Rather than dismissing the incumbent-- a skilled administrator with many powerful friends-- Mutharika decided to split the office of SPC into two, creating a Chief Secretary for the President and Cabinet and a Chief Secretary for the Public Service. He kept Muluzi's relative in the former position and appointed Matabwa to the latter. Matabwa, a mediocre administrator, is not respected for his leadership qualities, but his close personal relationship to the president enables him to wield enormous power, particularly in hiring and firing senior civil servants.

3. (C) Mutharika's two adult daughters are serving in positions inside State House. One is working as his personal assistant, and the other as a special assistant to the First Lady, as executive director of the Ethel Mutharika Foundation, which works to increase women's economic empowerment. The Foundation also serves as a political mobilization organization for the president and his party.

4. (C) Mutharika is believed to have appointed the Inspector General (IG) and the deputy IG of the police because they come from his home district of Thyolo in Southern Malawi. IG Mary Nangwale is the widow of a policeman from Thyolo. Nangwale's deputy, Often Thyolani, is also from Thyolo. When Parliament recently rejected Nangwale's appointment earlier this year, Mutharika responded by quickly appointing Thyolani acting head of the police.

5. (C) Comment: Nepotism has a long tradition in Malawian politics, and these family appointments follow a pattern established by both of Mutharika's predecessors. Former President Muluzi's wife, for example, also had a foundation that in practice acted as an arm of the United Democratic Front political party. However, Mutharika appears to be employing the practice because he does not fully trust his subordinates. Family members have remarked to Embassy officers that the president is troubled by infighting in his cabinet and is unsure which of his ministers can be fully trusted. In the complex and treacherous world of Malawian politics, Mutharika cannot be too careful in deciding where he decides to place his confidence. Considering Mutharika's very thin base of political allies, perhaps the surprise is that he has not resorted more heavily to nepotism.

GILMOUR